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NATIONAL CULTURE ORGANIZATION MUST GO TO THE REGIONS

By Lesmandewa Poerbakoesoema

- Indonesia -

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FOREWORD

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[Following is the translation of an article by Lesmandewa Poerbakoesoema in Mimbar Indonesia (Rostrum of Indonesia), Vol XIV, No 43, 22 October 1960, pages 22-23, 30]

Most people know what kind of organization the BKMN is. The Badan Musjawarah Kebudayaan Nasional [The National Culture Conference], which was founded on 14 April 1952 during a cultural conference in Djakarta, was created after the Lembaga Kebudayaan Indonesia was dissolved. It is incorporated by law and is subsidized by the government. In short, the BKMN is a semi-official organization of the government, while at the same time it is also an organization that lives and grows with society. If we look at its age, we can say that it is a mature organization. If we count its age from its inception in 1952, it is eight years old, and if we count in the old LKI, it is 10 years old.

The fact that it can live that long, plus the evidences of its endeavors, within the limits of its material and spiritual capabilities, is proof that while on the one hand the government is interested and is willing to help cultural development, on the other hand, the BKMN is enjoying society's complete confidence.

The BKMN is very advantageous, both for the government, as its trusted organizer, and for the people and society, as a place to channel their desires. Besides, as an organization that coordinates cultural activities without following any particular ideology, it should have the support of the whole society. The BKMN is indeed the only cultural organization that places cultural matters above ideological interests.

The organization of the BKMN is such that every member organization, regardless of its size, has equal rights in discussing cultural matters. However, in its report during a conference in Bandung, the Board of the BKMN stated:

"After the search for consolidation regarding regional culture and (national) Indonesian culture during the conference in Magelang, and the subsequent confrontation of Indonesian and foreign culture during the conference in Bandung, the need to discuss a third problem was felt, viz., what shall we do to ideally and really advance culture

in our society? Society is developing in three stages at the same time, from the regional level to the national level, and from the national level to the universal level. In this respect, we have to center our attention on the fact that there are various groups that are very different from each other, not only with regard to their cultural consciousness, but also with regard to the physical and spiritual tools that are needed by each group. According to the need that was felt at that time, the discussion was divided into cultural education in schools and cultural education for workers and farmers. This happened during the subsequent conference in Solo.

Thus the BKMN has succeeded in giving a scientific solution to the problems faced by each group. Whether or not the implementation will be successful, depends on the members themselves. Everybody who has a sound mind knows, of course, that the BKMN is not a theatre of war among the so many desires of society."

The report continued as follows:

"The task that history has given us has become heavier. Partly this is due to the task itself which is indeed a heavy task, but it is also the fault of this generation in which quarrels and distrust exist, and which has developed a materialistic mind. Even in this cultural organization, there are people who seek their own advantage or the advantage of their group, and they do this secretly as a tactic in the political struggle. There are fewer of those who want to dedicate themselves unselfishly to the interest of culture. Many symptoms show us the need for a review of the reasons as to why we have failed as a nation" etc.

The cultural organization can run smoothly only if we work purely on the basis of culture. As a coordinator of cultural activities, the BKMN does realize the existence of good and bad elements, especially because of the eventful situation since the revolution of August 17, 1945 until the present Manipol [The Political Manifesto] and USDEK. [Undang-undang Dasar 1945, Sosialisme Indonesia, Demokrasi Terpimpin, Ekonomi Terpimpin, Keperibadian Nasional -- Constitution of 1945, Indonesian Socialism, Guided Democracy, Guided Economy, National Character]. The question now is, what is the role of the BKMN in the present turbulent society? As a coordinator of cultural activities, the BKMN is responsible both to the government and to society. Life is never perfect, and in doing its tasks, the BKMN has met successes and failures. One of its successes is the scientific definition and the theoretical implementation in society of the regional and the national Indonesian culture. However, many people still do not know the importance of the regional culture in the development of the society. It is no secret that in discussing regional culture, people are afraid that they will make a slip of the tongue and make the mistake of fanaticism and aristocratism. In discussing culture, where we are concerned with social history, social ethics and social development, we are automatically involved with revolution and politics; but this does not mean that culture is a political tool, because culture itself has its own value. Thus if we discuss the regional culture, we do not center on its aristocracy and its feudalism, but discuss the

elements of regional traditions. The regional cultures are, in turn, the elements that should be adjusted to create the "Indonesian culture" in which ethics, literature, and art will be gathered.

Starting from this standpoint, the BKMN, whose task it is to coordinate culture in the broad sense, must be expanded to include the regions. In this way, those aspects of the regional culture that could not reach the conference in Djakarta, can now be dug up in their natural environment. In the regions, especially where cultural life grows abundantly, the BKMN may become an agent of the governmental cultural department to do the practical cultural activities, and not just doing administrative work of registering the regional organizations and giving them subsidies, which is, according to what the writer has heard, what they are doing presently. An organization like the BKMN should be the contact between the people and the regional government and implement a national cultural policy approach as opposed to the traditional way of life of the regional society. This way the BKMN will become a political instrument of the government in the field of culture to systematize the Pantjasila way of life. It is in these outer regions that the culture for the workers and for the farmers is found.

Of the cultural conferences, those that have done most are the conferences in Magelang, Solo, and Den Pasar. The three conferences have set forth the concept of culture in a positive way, viz., the scientific definition of "Regional Culture" and that of "National Culture", cultural education in schools, cultural education in urban societies, cultural education for workers and farmers, and the relationship between culture and the Constitution, and the relationship between architecture and art. There is no reason why the BKMN, because of its independent and democratic principle, should be unproductive and uncreative commensurate with the struggle in society.

The problem is: why do people not look for ways to make possible a controlled implementation of the cultural policy? Isn't all this the manifestation of a struggling culture, a revolutionary culture with political-economic-social aspects? There is only one thing that has, commensurate with the concept of "Culture for Culture's sake," purposely been avoided, and that is a culture "with a certain political-ideological concept". It is the universal culture which guarantees the continuity of the cultural life and which is useful for society. Both USDEK and the Political Manifesto are not for just one group in society, not for just one ideology, and that way it is understandable why an approach of synthesizing the Communist, the nationalist, and the Moslem is being followed.

The efforts of the BKMN are not limited to cultural conferences; in cooperation with the BKII [Badan Kongres Kebudayaan Indonesia -- The Indonesian Cultural Congress], it is recently held a symposium on "The National Character - from the point of view of psychology, physiology, and Metaphysics". Thus, we have also discussed our "National Character".

I have mentioned previously that the implementation of the results of the cultural conferences has been negative. One of the main reasons is that, although the BKMN has existed for eight or ten years, its

organization has still not expanded to the regions. The result is that the results of the cultural conferences that could have been worked on in the regions still exist merely on paper.

Actually, all members of the BKMN have the responsibility to implement the results of the conferences, both as an individual or through one's organization. For example, a result of the conference in Den Pasar in 1947 was "The Implementation of Community Culture", which concerns:

1. The stimulation of creative work and education in that direction.
2. To make the BKMN a contact between the producers of creative works and the society; to circulate their works as widely as possible, so that there will be more appreciation for them.

In the scope of the development of the national culture and the defining of our "national character", the representative position of the BKMN in the regions is clearly shown, and the result of the conference in Den Pasar, dealing with it, runs as follows:

Thanks to the efforts in the regions and to the cooperation with the government, the central and the regional BKMN, as semi-official bodies and as Culture and Art Advisory Councils, are playing a prominent role in the regions in the efforts:

1. To coordinate and to encourage the regional efforts throughout Indonesia.
2. To connect the efforts from the regions with those from the government and those from abroad.

Another aspect of the negativism is the failure to implement the results of the conferences in the past eight or ten years, which included science, education, philosophy, and art, and to sink in an ideological war. I don't think that the K in the USDEK is meant to be that way! What we should do is to use the results of past cultural conferences as a background of the problem concerning the national culture and to complement them with the USDEK. Especially in the field of culture as culture, it is better to have a confrontation than to have ideological conflicts.

The recent Cultural Conference which was held in Bandung in July 1960 resolved, among other things, to expand the organization of the BKMN and to change the charter and statutes so that they will become more concrete. This expansion will bring culture nearer to the people and the BKMN nearer to society. The people cannot be divorced from culture and the BKMN is nearing perfection. Only those members who understand the function of the BKMN, those who are not ill-willed, can do their task well.